Fairbury Area Ghost Towns

By: Dale C. Maley

For: Fairbury Blade newspaper

Date: January 13, 2020

The oldest ghost town in the Fairbury area is the village of Avoca. The McDowell family arrived north of Fairbury in 1832. The Village of Avoca was laid out in 1854 by Judge W.G. McDowell, who owned the land on which it was located. It was surveyed by Amos Edwards, then county surveyor. The first store was opened just before it was laid out as a village, and for several years it was a flourishing business place. The first post office was established in 1840.

In addition to the village of Avoca, there was also a church and a cemetery. An extremely rare 1911 map shows that Avoca had forty-eight residential building lots. There was also a public square. The streets were named Bluff, Clark, State, and Main Streets.

The early settlers likely picked this location for their village because it was on Indian Creek and less than one mile from the Vermilion River. The first ferry was over the Vermilion River. It was a raft made of red elm logs. When the river was too high to ford, they put their wagons and freight on the ferry. Their horses had to swim across.

One winter day, a man was in a hurry to cross the frozen river. His plan was to use the ice chunks on the river. He put his horses on the giant cake of ice, but the cake broke in two after the horses got on it. The horse's forefeet were on one piece of ice, and the hind feet were on another piece of ice. He finally got the horses on one piece of ice and paddled it over. He put the wagon on another piece of ice and got it over also, and then went on his way!

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its new tracks from Peoria to Indiana. The establishment of Fairbury was a death knell for the village of Avoca. Many of the houses in Avoca were moved to Fairbury and still stand today. The last funeral in Avoca church was in 1926. The last church was torn down in 1935, and the lumber was used at the Methodist camp in Lake Bloomington. The only thing left is Avoca Cemetery, and the township is still named Avoca.

Champlin is another ghost town northwest of Fairbury. There used to be a railroad from Fairbury to Pontiac called the Chicago & Paducah railroad. Moses Champlin moved from New York to a farm about 3 miles northwest of Fairbury in 1860. His wife was Tirzah Stanley of New York. They had six children. He was 51 years old when he arrived in Fairbury. His farm of 320 acres was next to the railroad tracks.

He built a grain elevator next to the tracks. The elevator was known as the Champlin train stop. We don't know if Moses had long-term ambitions to make a town around his elevator. The old Champlin grain elevator survived until the summer of 2016. The old elevator was carefully torn down, and the wood is being recycled for other uses.

Another ghost town northwest of Fairbury was Lodemia. It was between Fairbury and Pontiac on the old Chicago and Paducah railroad line. One of the early settlers in Lodemia was John Edward Bodley, Sr. from Fountain County, Indiana. He donated land for a church. At one time, Lodemia had a postmaster, a church, a country school, a Township Hall, and a grain elevator.

Eventually, all the buildings burned down. The grain elevator was raised, and a house sets on its foundation. There is no significant trace left of Lodemia.

A ghost town south of Fairbury was Potosi. Dr. Abraham Green started this village. In the Civil War, he enlisted in Company F, 136th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. After the war, he attended Rush Medical College in Chicago in 1865 and 1866.

There were about four houses, a country school, a post office in a home, and a blacksmith shop in Potosi. The post office was established in 1868 with David S. Crum as the postmaster. The wife of David Crum was Mary Ann Walton. She was the sister of Isaac Walton, the Fairbury department store owner. In 1880, the blacksmith shop was moved to Cropsey, and Dr. Green moved his store to Colfax. On March 27, 1880, the post office was discontinued.

The only remnant of Potosi's existence is a historical marker on First Street south of Fairbury. This marker gives a brief description of the village of Potosi. The Cropsey Woman's Club provided the historical marker in 1976.

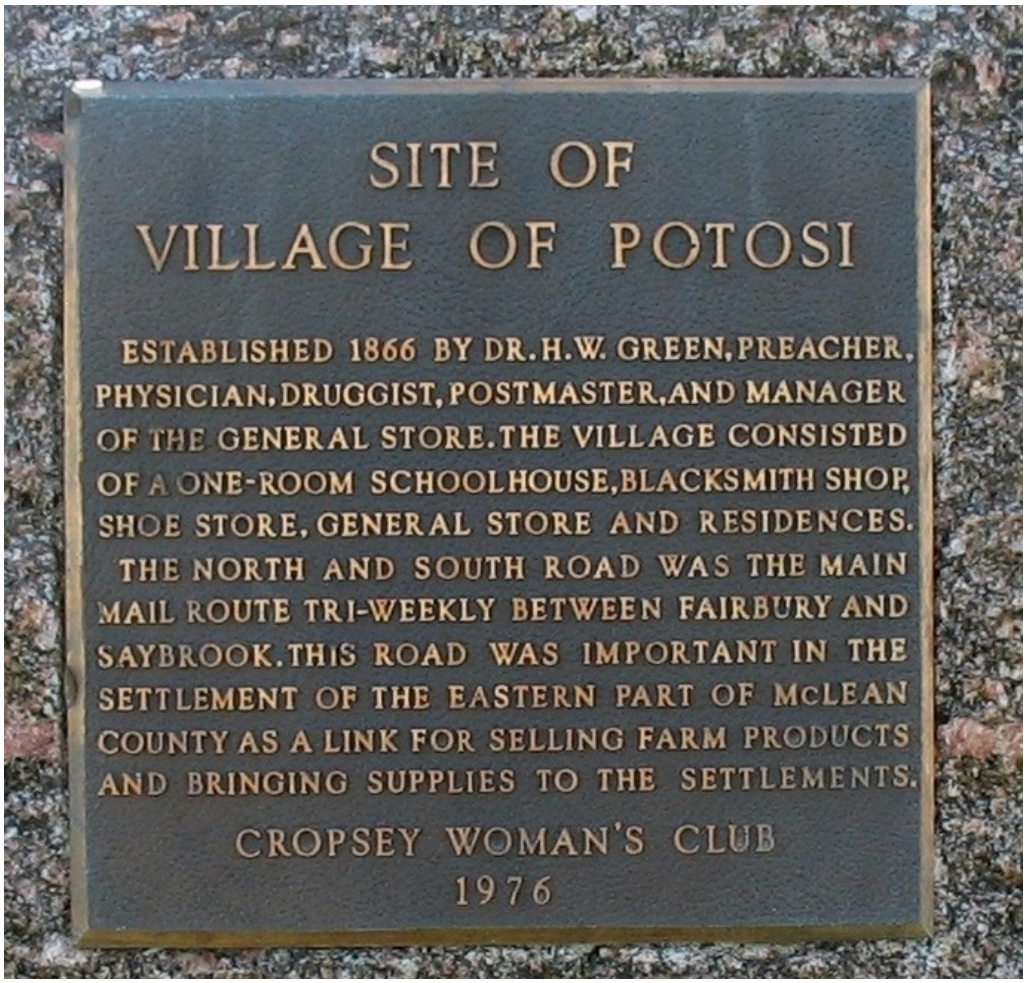
The last Fairbury area ghost town was also south of Fairbury. It was named Rosealthe or Rosalthe. It was a small village on the east side of Section thirteen in the Southeast corner of Belle Prairie township. It was initially called Alsop.

Daniel B. Stewart, the founder of Anchor, was responsible for establishing a trading center there. Mr. Stewart, who owned many acres of land in Anchor Township, was one of the leaders in the movement to get the Clinton, Bloomington, and Northeast railroad extended from the northwest into Fayette, Cropsey, Anchor, and Martin townships.

Mr. Cook stated that Rosealthe was located on low ground, and that mud and water were problems. An 1881 report in the Cropsey news noted that D. B. Stewart gave a ball in the city hall to try to encourage people to move to his village.

Stephen Herr, who lived across the road from Rosealthe, in Section eighteen, Fayette, township, was appointed postmaster on March 25, 1881. In 1881, the Cropsey news noted that a new tavern was opened in Rosealthe. This tavern was a last-ditch effort to attract people to live in the village.

Mr. Stewart was unsuccessful in encouraging people to move to his village. In January 1886, the Rosealthe depot was moved to Cropsey and was then used as a section house. The post office at Rosealthe was discontinued on March 3, 1886. No trace of this ghost town exists today.


SITE OF
VILLAGE OF POTOSI
ESTABLISHED 1866 BY DR. H.W. GREEN, PREACHER, PHYSICIAN, DRUGGIST, POSTMASTER, AND MANAGER OF THE GENERAL STORE. THE VILLAGE CONSISTED OF A ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE, BLACKSMITH SHOP, SHOE STORE, GENERAL STORE AND RESIDENCES.
THE NORTH AND SOUTH ROAD WAS THE MAIN MAIL ROUTE TRI-WEEKLY BETWEEN FAIRBURY AND SAYBROOK. THIS ROAD WAS IMPORTANT IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE EASTERN PART OF McLEAN COUNTY AS A LINK FOR SELLING FARM PRODUCTS AND BRINGING SUPPLIES TO THE SETTLEMENTS.
CROPSEY WOMAN'S CLUB
1976